

Forward Plan reference number: FP/954/01/21

Report title: Adoption of the Essex County Council Housing Strategy 2021-2025	
Report to: Councillor Tony Ball - Cabinet Member for Economic Growth	
Report author: Lee Heley, Head of Housing Growth	
Date: 15 March 2020	For: Decision
Enquiries to: Dan Baker, Housing Growth Lead, daniel.baker@essex.gov.uk	
County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To adopt the Essex County Council (ECC) Housing Strategy 2021-2025. The Strategy outlines the actions the Council will take to achieve its strategic priorities on housing and how it will work with its partners in the wider housing system. The Strategy has been amended in light of public consultation in May 2020 and ongoing engagement with housing partners.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Agree to adopt the proposed ECC Housing Strategy 2021-2025 in the form appended to this report.

3. Summary of issue

Background

- 3.1 The provision of the right amount, type and quality of housing is an important enabler of many of ECC's Strategic Priorities including to enable economic growth, support older people with care needs and other vulnerable groups to live independently, reduce health inequalities and create great places to grow up live and work.
- 3.2 ECC is not a housing authority, but it plays an important role in the complex housing system in Essex, through activities including:
- Planning, funding and delivering infrastructure to support housing delivery
 - Working with borough, city and district partners and government on proposed new settlements, garden communities, and locally led regeneration projects
 - Through Essex Housing as a developer of new open market, specialist and affordable homes on surplus public sector land, helping to meet housing need across the county
 - Providing support to people at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping via Housing Related Support funding
 - A statutory duty to provide accommodation and support to certain categories of Looked After Children and Care Leavers aged 16-17
 - Provision of supported housing - coordinating, commissioning and market shaping activity to ensure housing is available for vulnerable people and those with special requirements

- Strategic coordination on crosscutting issues e.g. homelessness prevention, improving health and wellbeing, and commission integration support for resettled refugees.
- 3.3 The Housing Strategy provides a way of signalling ECC's ambitions on housing, articulating the work already being done and opportunities to do more, and setting a framework for how ECC will engage with its housing partners.

The Strategic Goals of the Strategy

- 3.4 The Strategy sets out three strategic goals. For each strategic goal, the strategy identifies outcomes that ECC will work to achieve alongside local housing authorities, developers and housing associations.

- 3.5 The strategic goals are as follows:

Strategic Goal 1 - Growing Essex while protecting the best of the county:

- a. The number of new homes meet local needs, including for affordable homes
- b. Infrastructure enables the sustainable development of new communities and meets existing communities' needs
- c. House building provides jobs, develops skills and helps Essex firms to thrive
- d. New housing developments are built - and existing homes retrofitted - to meet net zero carbon requirements
- e. New high-quality homes and places are built across planned new garden communities in Essex
- f. Locally led regeneration schemes deliver economic, social and environmental benefits in key localities.

Strategic Goal 2 - Enabling people to live independently throughout their life

- a. New homes and places are designed for residents to live independent and healthy lives
- b. Homes are adapted and digital technologies adopted, to support residents to live independently
- c. Access to high quality specialist and supported accommodation for those who need it.

Strategic Goal 3 - Supporting people facing homelessness or rough sleeping

- a. Partnership working to end the need for people to sleep rough in Essex
- b. Partnership working to prevent homelessness and minimise the need for temporary accommodation.

- 3.6 ECC's role in helping to achieve these outcomes will be to work alongside partners to support the actions set out in the Action Plan appended to the Strategy. These include:

- Progressing agreed Essex Climate Action Commission recommendations impacting on housing
- Developing new Independent Living schemes for people aged 55 and over with care needs with nomination rights for ECC
- Delivering an expansion of ECC commissioned support to rough sleepers and households facing the threat of eviction or homelessness.

Consultation

- 3.7 A draft strategy consultation document setting out the proposed focus, goals and high-level actions of the strategy was developed in line with comments from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and ECC Cabinet Members. Further revisions were made through ECC officer workshops, informal feedback from district officers and from the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee in January 2020.
- 3.8 The draft strategy was subject to a public consultation from 3rd March 2020. The draft strategy consultation document was published on the ECC website alongside communications to local housing partners (local housing authorities, developers and housing associations) to encourage responses.
- 3.9 A planned 6-week consultation period was extended to 12 weeks in order to give people time to respond in recognition of the special circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3.10 Responses to the consultation from housing partners endorsed the strategic goals and welcomed the chance to work collaboratively with ECC on wider housing issues. Housing partners suggested adding greater clarity in the strategy about ECC's role and how it will support local housing authority partners to deliver their statutory responsibilities.
- 3.11 The majority of individuals/residents who disagreed with the strategic goals focussed their response on opposition to specific garden community proposals. ECC support delivery of new housing growth which meets garden community principles and as progressed by local planning authorities via Local Plans. The concerns about specific Garden Community proposals are noted, but these are determined through the Local Plan process and outside of the scope of the ECC Housing Strategy.
- 3.12 Concerns were also raised by individual respondents over the planned level of housing growth in Essex and whether this was responding to local needs. Housing targets are informed by government methodology on housing needs and as per adopted Local Plans. This process is outside of the scope of the ECC Housing Strategy, and ECC will continue to work with Local Planning Authorities to meet housing need.
- 3.13 Other notable issues raised through the consultation were:
- The need to deliver infrastructure alongside housing growth
 - Highlighting the role that housing and development of new places plays in meeting wider environmental goals around climate change, habitat and biodiversity loss
 - The importance of affordable housing to those who cannot access properties to rent or buy
 - The need to regenerate existing homes
 - The need for close working with housing partners to achieve shared outcomes.
- 3.14 The strategy was updated based on responses to the consultation and to reference the changed circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3.15 A final round of engagement with officers across ECC and with external partners was carried out in January and February 2021 to refine the strategy

and action plan. Activity as part of this second round of engagement included discussion and feedback on the strategy at a meeting of borough, city and district Housing portfolio holders and a follow-up session at the ECC Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee.

- 3.16 Further details on the consultation process and response can be found in the Engagement and Consultation report at Appendix 2.
- 3.17 It is proposed that the Strategy action plan is subject to an annual review and updated through engagement across ECC and with partners to ensure that it remains relevant.

4. Options

Option 1 – Adopt the ECC Housing Strategy 2021-25 (Recommended Option)

- 4.1 This is the recommended option given the anticipated benefits that adopting an ECC-owned Strategy developed through internal and external stakeholder engagement will achieve. The Strategy is a way of signalling ECC's ambitions on housing, articulating the housing related work already being done and opportunities to do more to help achieve ECC's corporate priorities. The Strategy sets a framework for how ECC will engage with its housing partners.

Option 2 – Do not adopt the ECC Housing Strategy 2021-25

- 4.2 This option would see ECC's work around housing continue in the absence of an overarching ECC housing strategy. There is no statutory requirement for ECC to develop a housing strategy. This option would not allow for the anticipated benefits of publishing a strategy as outlined in paragraph 4.1.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 ECC will work with external partners to monitor progress against the strategic goals and carry out an annual review of the action plan to ensure it remains relevant. ECC will explore the value in developing joint action plans with willing Borough, City and District partners to reflect local context.
- 5.2 ECC will continue to work with ECC officers to ensure the ECC Housing Strategy and action plan monitoring is aligned with the emerging ECC Organisation Strategy.

6. Issues for consideration

6.1 Financial implications

- 6.1.1 The Strategy does not commit ECC to any new expenditure with all activity included in the action plan delivered using existing allocated resources.
- 6.1.2 Where new funding is required to progress an action, this will be subject to due ECC processes seeking new resource allocations.

6.2 Legal implications

- 6.2.1 The Council is not required to have a strategy of this nature. The report explains how the strategy will benefit the Council's strategic priorities.
- 6.2.2 Adoption of the strategy does not commit the Council to any future commissioning or spending decisions.

7. Equality and Diversity implications

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful.
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 7.3 The Equality Impact Assessment indicates that the strategy will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on people who share a protected characteristic.
- 7.4 Any new equality and diversity considerations will be considered as part of the annual review and refresh of the action plan.

8. List of appendices


Appendix 1 Essex County Council Housing Strategy 2021-2025

Appendix 2 Essex County Council Housing Strategy 2021-2025 Engagement and Consultation Activity Report

Appendix 3 Equality Impact Assessment

I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.	Date
Councillor Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth	17th March 2021

In consultation with:

Role	Date
Executive Director for Place and Public Health	17/03/2021
 Mark Carroll	

Executive Director for Finance and Technology (S151 Officer)	16 March 21
Stephanie Mitchener on behalf of Nicole Wood	
Director, Legal and Assurance (Monitoring Officer)	9.3.21
Katie Bray on behalf of Paul Turner	